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RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0694  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0769  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2299  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1120  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0146  
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000446

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SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: POLITICAL ROUNDUP FOR THE WEEK OF  
JULY 5-9

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 431

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¶1. (U) Campaign against forced-feeding and over-eating: The Mauritanian government will launch a program in 2010 in conjunction with the United Nations Population Fund to fight cultural practices and perceptions that adversely affect women, including forced-feeding and over-eating. The program will be funded by the Spanish Government. Among certain Mauritanian cultural groups, extreme female plumpness is perceived as a sign of beauty. As a result, obesity related diseases and heart disease are prevalent among women. Although the practice of forced-feeding has somewhat subsided and is now mostly concentrated in rural areas, over-eating to conform to cultural standards has become an issue in urban areas. Many urban Mauritanian women endanger their health by taking pills to gain weight or increase their appetite. These pills can be obtained in local markets or at local pharmacies without prescription. The practice of forced-feeding (called "gavage") is in decline -- mostly through Mauritanian-driven social awareness but is ongoing among Mauritania's most traditional niches.

¶2. (U) OIF maintains Mauritania suspension: The Organisation internationale de la francophonie (OIF) decided to maintain Mauritania's suspension until after the presidential election. Secretary General Jack Legendre stressed that "Mauritania will not be reinstated until after the election and until sufficient proof of a transparent election is provided."

¶3. (U) Hanevy's lawyers issue press release: The group of lawyers defending Hanevy Ould Dehah -- the editor of the strongly anti-coup Taqadoumy website -- issued a communique on July 6 with a long list of violations of the Mauritanian law linked to Hanevy's arrest and detention (reftel).

¶4. (SBU) French citizen hospitalized with swine flu symptoms: After seeing on-line reports stating that a French citizen had been hospitalized in Nouadhibou with swine flu symptoms, EmbOffs called the World Health Organization (WHO) and the French Embassy for confirmation. Both sources confirmed the reports, adding that the Ministry of Health and the WHO had sent representatives to assist in taking samples, which are currently being processed in Dakar. Final results

should be available in the next few days (septel). The French Ambassador reassured PolOff there was no reason to be alarmed. He stated the hospitalized Frenchman had been traveling "with two Anglophones who could very well be American and who continued their trip to Nouakchott."

15. (U) Christians feel threatened: Taqadoumy reported that Christians living in Nouakchott feel targeted after the Christopher Leggett murder. According to Taqadoumy, some have "received threats and live in an ever increasing climate of insecurity." These reports have not been confirmed by post.

16. (U) Students have not been paid: Nouakchott University students protested July 5 to request payment of their scholarship stipends. According to press reports, Mauritanian students abroad have been unable to come home on vacation because they have not received money for plane tickets.

17. (U) Embassy's Fourth of July reception a success: Embassy Nouakchott's Fourth of July reception took place on July 8 with 300 guests in attendance. The Ambassador's speech, commending Mauriticians for their efforts to find a consensual solution to the political crisis and expressing the US' desire to strengthen relations with Mauritania following free and fair elections, was extremely well received with many guests conveying their appreciation. Minister of Justice and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Bal Amadou Tiejane, Representative of the Transitional Government of National Unity, focused on Christopher Leggett's murder and the need to fight extremism. His remarks also stressed the importance of strong US-Mauritania relations. The official delegation included the Government

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of National Unity's Minister of the Interior, the Secretary General of the Government, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Secretary General, Director of American and Asian Affairs, and Protocol Director. The Mauritanian delegation joined the Ambassador in planting an olive tree in memory of Mr. Leggett. High-level military officers in attendance included Chief of Staff of the National Guard General Felix Negri, Director of Security General Mohamed El Hadi and Chief of Staff of the Gendarmerie General Ahmed Ould Bekrine.

Note: These officers are former High State Council members and now are members of the Superior Council for National Defense. Negri's presence at the event may signal an acknowledgment within high-level military circles that it is acceptable to be seen with the Americans. End note. Presidential candidates conveyed their regrets as they were campaigning outside Nouakchott. Former President Abdallahi called the Ambassador on July 7 to say he regretted he was unable to attend. Prestigious members of parliament, political parties, civil society and the international community were present.

BOULWARE